

## **College interns get real workday experiences working at Medicaid**

Alabama Medicaid has some fresh, new faces these days while five Alabama State University interns put their education to work in the real world.

Last fall, two students from the ASU Social Work Department were assigned to the Agency's Beneficiary Services Division. Now, one of those students has returned to continue assisting eligibility staff with applicants and recipients. Four other students from ASU's School of Business are working in areas related to their majors.

"I believe it is very important for those of us that have a passion for public service to get others involved at a very early age," said Medicaid Commissioner Carol Steckel. "The future of the Medicaid Agency and all other state functions rely on our young people becoming familiar with state government and then working in state government. We hope they will consider using their skills to benefit the citizens of this state."

The Agency has worked with several higher education institutions to develop internships for their students in an effort to promote public service as a possibility for those nearing graduation. These efforts include opportunities for social work students from the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa and for Auburn University and Samford University pharmacy students as well as ASU students.

"There is a trend today where young people don't look at state government service as a career. We need to encourage more of our best and brightest young adults to consider working on behalf of this state," said Steckel.

JaHeidi Cooper, a social work major at ASU, returned for her second internship to work in Family Certification. JaHeidi says she knew she wanted to work with pregnant women, so when her professor referred her to Medicaid's SOBRA program, she knew it was the right fit. At the Montgomery County Health Department, she is the first person a prospective client meets and helps with their questions about the applications and the process.

The most enjoyment comes from "feeling like I have made a difference in someone's life," JaHeidi says. "They come in and they all have a story and need assistance, so it's good to know that I make a difference."

The job is a lot more involved than she expected, but the process is a lot more complicated than the clients think. "They think that you are the only person who can approve their application. They don't understand that it is a process."

Ernesto Cortes said he learned about Medicaid internships from his professors. "Now that I'm here, I'm really glad." Asked if he would consider state government as a career, he said, "It's definitely an option!"

The first task for the ASU junior accounting major is to compile an Excel spreadsheet of the agency's cell phone usage to help determine if there is any way to save money.

His biggest surprise? "I didn't expect to have my own office!"

Once he completes his degree at ASU, he plans to earn a master's in accounting before taking the CPA exam.

Other ASU business majors include Aaron Paul, who is helping reconcile one of the agency's programs accounts, while Devon Patterson is verifying appointments and claims in the NET program, and Helena Bryant is verifying audits for the Third Party Benefit Recovery Section.